

Developing and Teaching an Inclusive Curriculum

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Developing an inclusive curriculum is a transformative process for the instructor and the students. It entails a paradigm shift in which basic assumptions are examined and changed. Thus, undertaking the project requires desire, curiosity, willingness to travel into unknown pedagogical terrain, and patience with oneself and with one's students.

Women and men of color, white women, and the working class and underclass have been absent from the "center" of analysis, research, theory, and the curriculum. To locate the members of these groups at the "center" from the standpoint of their experience and perspective is an important step toward creating an inclusive curriculum. What does it mean to make this move and what are its implications?

Considering that this undertaking is a process, it is helpful to look at it in terms of phases (McIntosh 1990):

Phase I: White, middle/upper class, male experience, authors, and theorists are the focus of the syllabus. Their experience is considered to be synonymous with "the human experience." Their theories are thought to be "objective" and "uncontaminated" by political considerations.

Phase II: An exceptional white woman or person of color, author or theorist, is added to the Phase I syllabus. They are treated as an anomaly, the exception.

Phase III: Issues concerning people of color, white women and/or the working class are addressed as "problems" and "special topics." Members of groups that were invisible or distorted in Phase I and given token status in Phase II are coming into focus at the margins, but they are not yet at the center.

Phase IV: The lives of people of color, the working class, and white women are located at the center of the syllabus. To paraphrase McIntosh (1990), if you start with

the lives of people of color, for example, you will get to the lives of white men and women, but if you start with white men and women you will not necessarily get to the experience of any person of color. Thus, race, class, gender and sexual orientation are treated as interactive systems that shape *everyone's* experience and all social institutions.

Of course, as in the case of all stage theories, one may move back and forth from one phase to the other or experience aspects of more than one phase at the same time. Nonetheless, the phases illustrate, in broad strokes, what it means to embark on the journey toward the development of an inclusive curriculum.

Checklist

This checklist, an adaptation from Collins and Andersen (1987), is offered to help assess whether or not a syllabus is in concert with a Phase IV curriculum.

1. Does thinking about gender, race and class pervade the entire syllabus or are these issues treated as "special topics" or "social problems"?
2. Are all groups recognized as being affected by the interactive structures of race, class and gender or only white women, people of color and the working class?
3. Is one group's experience held as the norm against which others' are measured and evaluated?
4. Does one group dominate in defining the other groups, or do groups define themselves? Is diversity within that self-definition represented and articulated?
5. Does material in the syllabus reinforce prejudice and stereotypes or does it expose and refute them?
6. When teaching about people of color, are the assigned readings by authors of the same race and ethnicity as those you are studying? This is especially important

when studying the status of women in non-Western cultures and so-called minority cultures in the U.S.A. Are readings assigned by women within the culture who critically analyze their culture as well as by those who endorse the status quo?

Teaching Tips

The following teaching tips are divided into two sections. Section A provides two pedagogical techniques to help students embrace and benefit from an inclusive curriculum. Section B offers practical suggestions for the instructor so that her/his behavior in the classroom is congruent with the spirit of a diverse curriculum.

A. Pedagogical Techniques

Fostering Empathy

Many students, particularly those who belong to one or more categories of race, class, and gender that have been privileged and dominant, have trouble understanding and relating to people who are different from themselves. "Why do we have to hear all this stuff about Jim Crow, World War II internment camps, and broken treaties? I came to school to learn sociology. What does this have to do with sociology or me?" One can help to bridge this chasm by providing students with an opportunity to explore a time in their lives when they felt "different" from the dominant group or the majority.

1. Ask students to recall a time when they felt "different." Tell them to write it down. Give students a lot of latitude in defining the experience of being different. Some of them will need it.
2. Ask them to write about how others reacted to them. How they felt. How they behaved. For example, did they try to hide their difference? Accentuate or exaggerate it? Ask them to explore why they did what they did and whether it worked.
3. Finally, ask the students to write what others, from whom they were different, could have done to support them. Ask them to be very specific.
4. Ask students to share what they have written with two or three others in a small group.

5. Facilitate a discussion with the whole class with an eye toward building bridges and common ground. This is an opportunity to explore how the "same" treatment is not necessarily "equitable" or "fair" treatment. It can also be helpful to clarify differences among differences. For example, the experience of being the only ballerina among a group of friends who are tap-dancers is different from being a Chicana in a predominantly white school. The former is situational and limited in its impact. The latter, in contrast, carries with it the effects of historical and institutionalized prejudice and discrimination.

This exercise can be referred to during future lectures and discussions to help address denial of the issues at hand, blaming the victims and to examine what it means to take responsibility if one is a member of the dominant group or if one is "different."

Disabusing Stereotypes

Race, gender and class stereotypes are socially created lenses through which complex people are reduced to distorted but "manageable" characteristics. Such stereotypes are very resistant to change. Consequently, regardless of how scrupulous one is about trying not to reinforce stereotypes, there is always the risk that students will inadvertently draw unintended conclusions. The following exercise is useful in heading off the likelihood of this occurring.

1. Ask students to "brainstorm" stereotypes for a particular group whose experience is at the center of focus, e.g. African-American women. Write them on the chalkboard.
2. Examine the "sources" of the stereotypes. Where did students learn them? From family? Friends? Religious institutions? Textbooks? Media? Be specific.
3. Test the verity of the stereotypes. For example, "most women on welfare are African-American." This stereotype can be disabused by offering the following information: Most women on welfare are white; most African-American women are in the labor force; there is a significant population of highly educated middle-class African-American women.

4. Explore with the class why such stereotypes persist when they are factually wrong. Whose interests do such images serve? African-Americans? Middle and upper-middle-class whites? How do they serve those interests, i.e., what social contradictions and tensions do the stereotypes resolve and for whom?
5. Create new positive images from the point of view of those whose experience is being discussed. Be prepared with ideas of your own. Your students might find it difficult to generate nonstereotypic images. **DO NOT** single out students who represent the group under consideration to answer this question.
6. Compare and contrast the new images with the original stereotypes. Explore their implications in the context of the interrelatedness of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in the society under discussion.

B. Concrete Teaching Tips

1. Do not ask students of color or a white female to give "the African-American point of view" or the "woman's point of view" on any given topic. An individual cannot speak for a group. To ask a student to do so is not only potentially embarrassing for the student, but it implies that there is not a diversity of perspectives within the group.
2. Do not expect, and do not ask, students of color to be knowledgeable about their history or culture. The same applies to language. For example: do not ask a Chinese-American student, "How would you say this in Chinese?" Many students of color have not had an opportunity to learn the history, culture, and/or language of their ethnic heritage. Even those who have had such cultural and educational opportunities may not wish to be involuntarily singled out.
3. Become conscious of your assumptions regarding students of color. For example, do you assume that all Asian students are good at math? Asians are highly intelligent? African-American males are not very smart and are attending college on athletic scholarships? Students of color are less qualified or intelligent than your white students? Be careful not to act on these assumptions, or other assumptions if you hold them, when relating to your students.
4. Anticipate students' tendency to negatively stereotype women, people of color, and lesbians and gays. By so doing, the stereotypes can be made conscious and dispelled. For example, before beginning the study of an American Indian nation, invite students in a nonthreatening way (e.g., brainstorming) to identify stereotypes of American Indians. Examine and dispel the stereotypes one by one. (See *Disabusing Stereotypes*)
5. You are a role model to your students. Share your own process of developing awareness of gender, class, sexual orientation, and race/ethnic stereotypes and issues. Help students understand the value of a diversity perspective in their personal, academic and future professional lives. Use examples from your own life.
6. Learn to use gender inclusive (non-sexist) language. Encourage your students to do the same when they speak in class as well as in their writing.
7. Use (learn) group facilitation skills to productively manage discussions regarding the difficult subjects of race, gender, class and sexual orientation.
8. Create a comfortable climate for students who are in the minority in your class by not making them inappropriately visible. For example, in a class in which women are a clear minority, don't say something like, "We shouldn't make sexual references like that; we'll embarrass Sally and Jane."
9. Be aware that silence on the parts of students of color and women does not necessarily mean they are comfortable with the class. It might mean the contrary and that they are reluctant to speak up about it. If you are concerned about this, do not single out, publicly or privately, students of color or women and ask them how they feel about the class. They likely would feel uncomfortably visible and you probably would not get a candid response. Rather, approach the whole class with something like, "I am

concerned that some points of view are not being expressed. I think we are missing out on important, diverse opinions. What would make it safer and easier for more of you to speak up?" The faculty member might suggest some diverse opinions that are missing as well as ask for examples. Invite everyone in the class to contribute.

10. Be clear about your motivation for creating an inclusive curriculum. If you are doing it for other than personal and/or scholarly reasons, e.g., approval of your students of color and women students, you might be disappointed. For any number of reasons your efforts might not be appreciated. Also, be prepared to address the concerns of students who feel confused or resentful of an inclusive curriculum. (See #5)

References

- McIntosh, Peggy. *Interactive Phases of Curricular and Personal Revision with Regard to Race*. In press, SUNY.
- Collins, Patricia Hill and Andersen, Margaret L. *An Inclusive Curriculum: Race, Class and Gender in Sociology Instruction*. Washington, D.C.: ASA Teaching Resources Center, 1987.

Recommended Reading

To explore the topic further, Deborah Flick suggests the following books and articles:

- Anderson, M.L. and P.H. Collins, eds. *Race, Class and Gender*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992.
- Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage, 1983.
- DuBois, Carol Ellen and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds. *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality*. Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983.
- Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: Bantam, 1984.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984.
- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women

Studies." In *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, edited by M. L. Andersen and P.H. Collins, 70-81. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992.

Rothenberg, Paula S., ed. *Race, Class and Gender in the United States*. 2d ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

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Biography

Deborah Flick is a senior instructor in the Women Studies Program at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She received an M.A. in Psychology from Sonoma State University and a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Colorado.

Deborah originally came to appreciate and value diversity as a result of her work in feminist organizations. Specifically, she founded Denver Safe House for battered women in 1977 and in that context learned first hand how sexism, racism, classism and homophobia inflict pain and suffering on everyone, albeit in different ways. Struggling with these issues personally and publicly led Deborah to the certain knowledge that embracing diversity in the classroom is essential to the honesty and integrity of the curriculum as well as to classroom dynamics and interactions. Much of what Deborah has learned and is learning about curriculum development and teaching techniques is the result of interaction and support from colleagues, her reading of diversity literature, and experimentation, which inevitably includes a fair number of failures along with some successes.

Deborah speaks widely on women's subjects, delivering papers on such topics as violence against women, feminist organizing, and the empowerment of women. She has helped to develop programs for battered women in cities throughout the state of Colorado and has consulted with a number of public and private organizations—including IBM, the city of Boulder, and Hewlett-Packard—to improve the position of people of color and women in the workplace.